



**Experimentation of
innovation actions for
preserving commercial
services**



AlpCity Partner	Lombardy Region (Italy)
Work Package	Economic development (WP5)
WP Coordinator	Lombardy Region (Italy)
Subjects involved and their role	<p><u>Project Partner:</u> Lombardy Region – Trade, Fairs and Markets Department Paolo Mora Tel. +39 0267656824 Fax +39 67656218 E-mail: paolo_mora@regione.lombardia.it</p> <p>Marialuisa Dagnino Tel. +39 0267658461 Fax +39 0267656218 E-mail: marialuisa_dagnino@regione.lombardia.it</p> <p>Alessandra Izzo Tel.+39 0267653653 Fax +39 0267656218 E-mail: alessandra_izzo@regione.lombardia.it</p> <p><u>Subcontractors:</u> A.D.I.E. (Agenzia d'informazione europea) CESTEC (Centro Lombardo per lo sviluppo tecnologico e produttivo dell'artigianato e delle piccole imprese)</p>
Spatial area involved	<p>Two areas were selected as objects of the case study: Alta Valle Camonica and Alto Garda Bresciano in the mountain province of Brescia. Within these zones, seven municipalities were selected on the basis of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- low density of population (less than 2.000);- lacking involvement in substantial tourist flows;- more than 20% of elderly population (age ≥ 65 year old.)
Project budget	€ 50.000,00
Project purpose	The case study aimed at improving life quality in mountain areas; spreading good and



best practices; increasing the value of the social dimension of trade through maintaining adequate commercial services standards in the mountain and disadvantaged areas of the Region.

The action classified municipalities according to the criticalities in commercial service equipment, the inadequate tourist attractiveness and the need of increasing the value of existing handicraft activities.

The pilot actions aimed at laying the foundations for a genuine partnership involving large-scale retail trade, small retailers, trade association and local handicraft activities; it represented an innovation element because it called on actors acting previously as competitors with the purpose to establish a new balance.

Moreover the case study targeted the start up of an experiment with excellent features to support the activation of experimental enterprises in many parts of the regional territory through a subsidy function.

Project methodology

The applied methodology includes:

- focus groups with all actors involved;
- dialogue with civil society through public consultation (survey on consumer habits) also in order to raise awareness of changes to be faced;
- a round table organised in order to agree and sign up a convention with reciprocal obligations for large-scale retail trade, small retailers, trade association, municipalities;
- training activities addressing the basic training needs of the retailer (especially about commercial management and merchandising techniques).

Every step must be regarded in a perspective of equitable level for all participants with a spirit of genuine partnership. All this together with the ultimate goal of improving an active participation as key element for the success of the project.

Project activities

The following activities has been carried out:

- Organisation of two focus groups with local authorities, trade associations and representatives from Mountain Communities.
- Public authorities and other involved subjects focused on the priority of sharing a strategic approach in setting up the development guidelines for the area. Furthermore, in their opinion any initiative must target the empowerment of local identity, through the development of a brand for products and services.
- “On the field” analysis of consumer’s habits, supply and demand, existing public services, etc.
- Enquiry through two questionnaires: the first-one concerning citizens; the second one public authorities. The inquiry about consumer’s habits identified their preferences when buying goods and services in their daily life (then frequency of shopping, distance and time employed, means of transport etc.). The objective of the analysis concerning public bodies consisted in collecting data about: accessibility, tourist vocation, need to increase commercial services, existing public services and postal services, availability of public places for multi-service shops and/or for itinerant trade.
- Presentation and discussion of best practices and European projects already settled in order to verify the possible transfer in similar contexts.
- Set up of a feasibility assessment of the project.

Achieved results

Great involvement of local actors through the focus group.

Clear identification of real local emergencies and expectations.

Identification of a new model of cooperation among small retailers and large-scale trade.

Agreed work methodology based on a bottom-up approach.



Discrepancies between planned results and results achieved

The gap between planned results and achieved ones is due to an inadequate attitude on the side of retailers and municipalities in front of the challenge of modernising trade with neighbours.

Instruments proposed, revised and finalised

A strategy paper
A draft convention among small retailers and large-scale retail traders
A web site

Impact on the local environment, actors and stakeholders

Major positive impact is due to the shared desire of municipalities to cooperate among them and to identify a common strategic approach by means of building a real consensus with all other actors (retailers, regional authorities, trade associations, etc.).

Critical aspects

Tourist presences only during the summer season.
Precariousness of job in the tourist sector.
High fiscal pressure.
New rules which make difficult to apply legislation for health and food security matters
Inadequate resources to support typical products.

Lessons learned

Positive outputs related to the work methodology, particularly referring to:

- Participated planning (involvement of the local authorities and retailers' associations).
- Interviews with customers, citizens and policy-makers to point out needs and availability.
- A study about the retail services standard involving citizens, statistics, trade solidity and monitoring of shops opening and closure.
- Opportunity related to the Objective 2 Call Measure 1.11 "Support to trade services re-qualification and development of closeness services", which gave the financial support to the renewal of existent shops and to the experimentation of multi-service shops.

The case study outlined that multi-service shops are not known in Lombardy (although considered in some regional planning instruments since 2003) and, particularly in mountain areas: for this reason experimentation must be supported by a long information step addressing retailers, and by financial resources devoted to start-up and experimenting.

After these premises, the outputs of the ongoing experimentations can be considered really satisfactory, since they allowed the survival of some shops and, as consequence, of the essential services in a context of strong trade desertification.

Also a difficulty can be pointed out as regards the topic of trade service considered as part of the problems of local economic development: for the future the start up of new projects is expected in order to integrate trade services with development focusing on local resources: tourism, agriculture, typical products.

Transferability

The work methodology is repeatable: regional authorities are working for the transfer of the AlpCity experience to all regional mountain areas.

At present a call with regional resources has being carried out in order to advertise the case study of Brescia and find projects with a larger functional integration, able to solve the problem of trade desertification also through different selling formats.

Case study Follow-up

There is the will to start up projects integrated with other urban functions.
There is also a progressive increase of multi-service shops, introducing other selling channels, even if it is really difficult to settle an agreement between different forms.



The case study has been the basis for the new regional planning on commerce (Triennial Programme for Development of Trade Sector 2006-2008).

**Common issues
with other
projects**

Within Interreg Vital Cities Project (Cadses Area) a mapping of Lombardy Mountain Provinces critical trade areas has been developed; this method has been extended to the whole region through the Triennial Programme for Development of Trade Sector 2006-2008 (the major planning instrument for trade policy in Lombardy Region).

**SSC Experts'
comments and
recommendations**

This project aimed at improving the quality of life in disadvantaged mountain areas through a set of tools such as enquires, exchange of practices, participation, setting up of conventions, feasibility studies, etc.; the use of several instruments aimed at achieving a clear picture of the potential development of the trade sector offered an added value to the project. Furthermore the project foresaw follow up activities (activation of calls according to regional laws). In this way it answers to the AlpCity purpose as the first step towards implementation. The case study has a long-term strategy that will assure follow up activities; this aspect is recommended by the Interreg policies. The experiment can be exported from the methodological point of view to other partners, who wish to improve life quality in mountain areas.